

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 IO-13 ISO-00 HA-05 CIAE-00 COME-00
EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04 NSAE-00 SIL-01 DODE-00 PM-05
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R 180600Z MAY 78
FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7684
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN
AMCONSUL DURBAN
USMISSION GENEVA
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

C O N F I D E N T I A L JOHANNESBURG 1254

CAPE TOWN ALSO FOR EMBASSWO

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PLAB, PINR, SHUM, SF, US
SUBJ: SOUTH AFRICA'S LABOR CZAR: NIC WIEHAHN

REF: JOHANNESBURG 0917

1. SUMMARY: USING A STYLE WHICH IS REMINISCENT OF THE
TACTICS OF INFORMATION MINISTER CONNIE MULDER, NIC
WIEHAHN IS ATTEMPTING TO ORCHESTRATE LABOR CHANGE IN
SOUTH AFRICA, AS WELL AS THE INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES
FOR SUCH CHANGE. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING A RECENT DINNER MEETING, NIC WIEHAHN, CHAIR-
MAN OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY INTO LABOR LEGIS-
LATION, INFORMED THE REGIONAL LABOR OFFICER HIS NEW
TARGET IS TO PREPARE AN INTERIM MEMORANDUM BY OCTOBER
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WHICH WOULD SERVE AS THE BASIS FOR DRAFT LEGISLATION
IN THE NEXT SESSION OF PARLIAMENT. FORMAL TESTIMONY
BEFORE THE COMMISSION ENDED ON MAY 12. AMONG THE LAST
TO TESTIFY WERE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE BUREAU OF STATE
SECURITY. THE COMMISSION'S FINAL REPORT MAY NOT BE
READY, HOWEVER, FOR COUPLE OF YEARS DUE TO THE VOLUME
OF EVIDENCE TO BE COLLATED (MORE THAN 20,000 PAGES OF

EVIDENCE AND BETWEEN 300 AND 400 MEMORANDA, BOOKS AND OTHER DOCUMENTS.)

3. WHILE HE DID NOT USE THE TERM, WIEHAHN SEES HIS ROLE AS THAT OF A LABOR CZAR. HE EXPECTS THE LIFE OF HIS COMMISSION TO BE EXTENDED AT LEAST FOUR OR FIVE YEARS IN ORDER TO ASSIST THE SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT IN IMPLEMENTING ITS RECOMMENDATIONS. HE ALSO HOPES TO BE APPOINTED HEAD OF THE LABOR COURT WHICH WILL BE RECOMMENDED BY THE COMMISSION. THE LABOR COURT WOULD BE USED BY WIEHAHN TO RESTRUCTURE THE SOUTH AFRICAN LABOR MOVEMENT. HE BELIEVES, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT THERE ARE TOO MANY UNIONS. THROUGH THE LABOR COURT, HE PLANS TO FORCE THE DE-REGISTRATION OF UNIONS WHICH HE FINDS REDUNDANT.

4. WIEHAHN IS ALSO BEING PROCLAIMED BY MINISTER OF LABOR FANNIE BOTHA AS SOUTH AFRICA'S "ROVING LABOR AMBASSADOR". FOLLOWING HIS RECENT TRIP TO THE UNITED STATES AND EUROPE (JOHANNESBURG 0917), WIEHAHN SAID IN A PRESS INTERVIEW THAT HE HAD MET INTER ALIA WITH CONGRESSMEN SOLARZ AND TSONGAS. HE ALSO CONFIRMED IN CONVERSATION WITH THE RLO HIS MEETINGS WITH AFL-CIO, TUC AND ICFTU OFFICIALS. IN DEFENDING WIEHAHN'S TRAVELS, BOTHA ASSERTED IN PARLIAMENT THAT WIEHAHN'S CONFIDENTIAL

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TRIP WAS SO SUCCESSFUL IT "SAVED SOUTH AFRICA FROM TWO LABOR BOYCOTT ATTEMPTS". WHEN PRESSED TO GIVE DETAILS, WIEHAHN SAID, "IF I COMMENT TOO MUCH IT MIGHT EMBARRASS OTHERS, BUT I HAVE SUCCEEDED IN TALKING TO IMPORTANT PEOPLE AND GIVING THEM AN INSIGHT INTO WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE".

5. COMMENT: WHETHER OR NOT HE BECOMES THE LABOR CZAR OF SOUTH AFRICA, WIEHAHN IS INCREASINGLY FUNCTIONING AS THE GODFATHER OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT. IN A HIGHLY UN-ORTHODOX FASHION SIMILAR TO THE TACTICS OF MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND PLURAL RELATIONS CONNIE MULDER, HE IS CONDUCTING AN ALMOST SINGLE-HANDED CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE SOUTH AFRICA'S EMPLOYMENT PRACTICES IMAGE. WHETHER HIS EFFORTS LEAD TO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE OR MERE WINDOW DRESSING WILL DEPEND ON THE EXTENT TO WHICH INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE IS MAINTAINED, AS WELL AS THE INTERNAL DYNAMICS OF SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY AND WIEHAHN'S SKILL AS AMANIPULATOR OF PEOPLE AND INSTITUTIONS.
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